

Jury awards \$8M in assault suspect's arrest-related death

Attorneys for Darren Burley's family say he died 12 days after police choke-hold cut off oxygen to his brain.

By Scott Smith | Jan. 1, 2015 at 9:50 PM

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LONG BEACH, Calif., Jan. 1 (UPI) -- The Los Angeles Times reports that after deliberating for two days, a civil court jury has awarded \$8 million to the family of a man who died during a violent fight with police in Compton.

Darren Burley, 29, [died 12 days after his arrest](#) on what began as a misdemeanor assault on Aug. 3, 2012. Police responded to a call of a man choking a pregnant woman.

Los Angeles County sheriff's deputies admit to punching, Taser-ing and piling onto Burley to get handcuffs on him during the arrest.

But attorneys for Burley's family say they also put him in a choke hold, blocking the flow of oxygen to his brain, which sheriff's officials deny.

Police say Burley's death was caused by a heart attack brought on by years of drug abuse. They say he was under the influence of PCP and cocaine at the time of his arrest.

The jury found the county liable for police negligence and battery. Although they said Burley was 40 percent responsible for the incident, the battery finding means Burley's family -- a wife and five children -- will get the full \$8 million award. Prosecutors declined to file criminal charges against the two deputies, David Aviles and Paul Baserra.

The victim of Burley's alleged attack thanked police in an interview afterward, saying they saved her life.

In their original filing, attorneys for Burley's family [accused the officers](#) of being racist.

"None of the deputy defendants who battered, Tasered, and struck Mr. Burley was African American. Consequently, in choosing to exercise severe and malicious force against him, each of the defendants discriminated against him on account of his race," the original complaint stated.

The jury's decision comes amid a [tense climate of protests](#) over police [treatment of black suspects](#).

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